The Canon's Mouth.

THE CANON had had a worrying morning. It began with the bacon, and not even a canon is impervious to the chill of bacon which has outgrown its hot youth. Then there were other things. The canon had a conscience and that conscience was pricking him for having stayed so late at a dinner party the night before that he had no time before going to bed to revise the notes for his speech at the meeting of the Peace association, and a dinner party in a cathedral city at which one stays later than one had intended leaves its mark upon the morning's temper, even though one be a canon. However, Canon Beckford reflected that between Bristol and London he would have two clear hours in which to revise his notes. So having, we will say, prayed for the bacon's happiness in another world, he ate it and turned to his letters.

It was just his luck. On the very morning when he wished to preserve a calm and equable mind, he must be bothered with that boy Reggie and his preposterous proposals. You must admit that the canon had reason for his annoyance. The eldest son of a duke can afford to marry a chorus girl, or indeed, commit any social enormity he pleases short of marrying two. But the eldest son of a canon has no right to kick over the traces. Now Reggie, who was articled to a solicitor in Lincoln's Inn Fields, had stated his intention of marrying a young woman whose name—as it appeared on the play bills—was Cissie Morrison. The canon winced as it occurred to him. He winced again as he reflected upon the career of her parent, who had driven a cab in Bristol until drink had landed him in the prison infirmary. The canon was old-fashioned and objected to the mixture of the classes. He was old-fashioned enough to write to Reggie and threaten to cut him off with a shilling if he persisted in his ridiculous course of action. And here was Reggie's ultimatum, a definite declaration of independence. The canon forgot the bacon, forgot his forthcoming speech, and stamped up and down the dining room in uncanonical rage, until a faithful wife reminded him that a hansom awaited him at the door. He threw his notes into a bag, and plunged into the hansom.

"Good gracious!" he murmured as he caught sight of the driver. "To think that I and such a man might be co-equal grandfathers!"

That is why the canon was nearly late for the train. He was known in Bristol society as the "Smooth Bore," being a canon much given to suave commonplaces. But it was a very different kind of a canon who raced, heralded by porters, up the platform by which the London express was straining at the leash, a hurried, flurried, warm canon.

"Now, then, 'urry up, please!" cried the guard, with his whistle at his lips.

"Not smoking," panted the canon as he ran behind the porter, who carried his bag.

"You don't mind the lady, sir?" whispered the porter, opening a carriage door.

"Not at all, not at all," gasped the canon, rumbling for sixpence.

The train moved, and Canon Beckford, aided by the porter, plunged into the compartment, and into the lap of the lady who occupied it. She gave a little scream. The canon picked himself up and settled his collar.

"Really, I must apologize for my unceremonious entry," he said. "It was due rather to the—the precipitancy of the train than to any desire on my part to take so unwarrantable a liberty as—as—er—sitting where I—sat."

It was a lame ending. But the canon, being no more than human, had noted that his companion was young, well favored and dowered with a merry eye, and the discovery had, so to speak, thrown him off his peroration.

"Oh, don't mention it," said the lady. "I trust I did not hurt you?"

"Not in the least."

"Ah, more frightened than hurt," suggested the canon, dropping into his jocular manner.

"No, not even frightened," said the young lady calmly, smoothing out the newspaper which the canon had crumpled.

By this time the train was dipping in and out of the tunnels on the way to Bath.

"Are we to be companions, as far as Paddington?" asked the canon pleasantly.

The lady laid the paper down on her knees, indicating her willingness to talk.

"Well, it depends on you," she replied, with an engaging frankness. "I'm going up to town for the new piece. I don't suppose you've heard of it—the new piece?"

"Ah, quite a coincidence!" said the canon, his thoughts turning to the notes of his speech to the recently established Peace association. "So am I."

"What, you don't mean to say you are interested in it?"

"I am very deeply interested," said the canon.

"You mean you are one of the promoters?"

"I have done my best to further its interests."

"Well, that is funny! You've got a stall."

"I have occupied a stall for many years."

"The same one. But it is not unlikely that it may ere long be changed for one of—er—greater prominence. And you are really taking a part?"

"I should think I am." The lady's eyes sparkled.

"You will speak?" asked the canon.

"I shouldn't think of taking any other part. But really it is funny I didn't know that clergymen took an interest in these things. You are a clergyman, aren't you?"

"Certainly I am. But why should you think it funny? Why should not a clergyman take an interest, do his utmost to promote—"

"Well!"

"It is surely the truest Christianity to advocate a peace which must benefit every one, must appeal to every one—except, perhaps, the military men."

"Oh, I assure you, the officers will be perfectly wild about it. It's just the thing they can understand."

"Dear me! You astonish me. Yet perhaps a peace which contains no element of shame—"

"Oh, it's all right in that way—"

"Would appeal even to an officer in his majesty's service."

The canon leaned back in his seat and meditated on this new view of life, while the lady resumed her newspaper and the express panted out of the Box Tunnel and was encouraged to hasten by the scent of Swindon in the distance.

The canon felt in his coat pocket and found Reggie's letter. It was just the sort of impetuous boy's letter which irritates the middle-aged. Canon Beckford read it once again.

"Dear Governor: I'm awfully sorry to disobey you, but whatever happens I am determined to marry Cissie. If you would consent to see her, I am sure you would like her. She is the best girl in the world. If you cut off my allowance of course I shall have to chuck the law and try what I can do on the stage. I daresay I shall get on all right, because Cissie is just he sort of girl to help a man. But, all the same, I should be grieved if you turned your back on your affectionate son. REGGIE."

"Consent to see her, indeed!" muttered the canon ,as the preposterous conduct of his son stood out before him in its most outrageous colors. He tore the letter across and across, and threw the pieces on the floor of the carriage.

"You have dropped the envelope," said the young lady, sweetly, handing it to the canon.

"Oh, thank you—thank you! Pardon me; I was agitated—annoyed. A purely personal matter."

The lady picked up her dressing bag and put it on the rack, taking care to cram the label into obscurity. Then she sat down opposite the canon.

"Tell me," she said. "You needn't mind; we may never see one another again—and a woman can often help a man."

The canon stared. But a pretty woman who offers assistance is not generally denied.

"You could scarcely understand," he said "But I'm bothered about a son of mine who wants to marry a girl from—from the footlights."

"And why not?"

"Oh, obviously—"

"You have seen her?"

"God forbid!"

"And does she insist on—on your son marrying her?"

"I should assume that she would be glad of such an alliance."

The young lady leaned back for a moment and thought. Then, bending forward, she began again:

"Canon Beckford—"

"How did you know?" asked the canon, as she hesitated.

"Oh, I saw your name on the envelope. But what I was going to say is this: That if she was a good girl, really a nice girl, she wouldn't want to marry your son at the risk of dragging him down. If she felt that she would ruin him she would send him away, and—well—and perhaps she would ruin herself to save him. You see what I mean?"

"If she took that view—"

"Perhaps she does. You've never seen her."

"Young women of that class," the canon began, and hesitated. "But of course you know nothing of them."

"Oh, but I do! Do you know, I'm in precisely the same situation. An obdurate parent refuses his consent to his son's marriage with me—absolutely refuses."

"Why does he refuse?" asked the canon.

"Because he thinks I am not worthy of his son."

"He has not seen you," said the canon.

"He has," replied the young lady.

"Frankly, I can't believe it," said the canon. "If he had seen you he must have consented."

"Tickets, please," called the inspectors.

For two minutes conversation was interrupted, owing to the stop at Westbourne Park. Then the train began to slide into Paddington.

"What are you laughing at?" asked the canon.

"Do you really mean you would have consented?"

"Certainly. But may I call you a cab, or—"

"Thanks, I'm being met," said the young lady.

The train drew in to the platform in its deliberately weary way.

The canon opened the door of the carriage, lifted out the young lady's dressing bag, and tried with his finger to bring the label into the line of vision. As he tried a young man stalked up to the platform and linked his arm in the canon's.

"Hullo, governor!" he said, extending the other hand to the owner of the dressing bag. "It was jolly of you to bring Cissie up. I knew that letter would fetch you."—The King.

Who Can Write the Best Short Story?

The Tribune Offers Cash Prizes to Local Writers of Local Fiction

$25.00 FOR THE BEST STORY.

$10.00 FOR THE SECOND BEST.

$5.00 FOR THE THIRD BEST.

A LITERARY COMPETITION WHERE EXPERIENCE IS NOT NECESSARY IN ORDER TO WIN.

In view of the fact that considerable time has elapsed since there has been any public competition through the local press for the purpose of stimulating the literary ability latent among the people of Northeastern Pennsylvania, The Tribune has decided to offer a series of prizes as a stimulus in this direction. It is desirous of securing for use in its columns a number of short stories treating of local themes. In order to furnish an incentive it proposes to pay

$25 for the best story of not to exceed 3,000 words in length;
$10 for the second best story, and
$5 for the third best story.

Manuscripts not successful in securing one of these prizes will be published and duly credited if the authors so desire.

Stories tending to bring out the romance and legendary lore of the anthracite mining industry will have preference. In connection with every mine in the valley there is a mass of tradition, including hair-breadth escapes, narratives of spooky happenings and other details bordering on the weird or supernatural which has never been gathered together in literary form. This opens a field which is practically inexhaustible and which should supply the material for some exceedingly interesting fiction.

The task of passing upon the merits of the manuscripts submitted will be assigned to a disinterested judge, whose name will soon be announced, and who will read the manuscripts but have no knowledge of the identity of the authors. The envelopes containing the real names of the authors will be preserved unopened until after the awards have been made.

Should this initial competition prove encouraging, it may be followed by other prize offers of similar tenor.

CONDITIONS OF THE CONTEST.

All manuscripts must be submitted not later than March 30.

All manuscripts must be signed by a fictitious name and accompanied by a sealed envelope containing the fictitious name and also the writer's real name and post office address.

The scene of each story must be laid in Northeastern Pennsylvania, but the names of real persons must not be used.

One further condition must be understood. Contributions intended for this contest will be accepted only from present subscribers to The Tribune or from those who may, during the contest, become subscribers by payment of at least one month's subscription in advance.

Address,
STORY CONTEST,
Scranton Tribune,
Scranton, Pa.

HIGH ELECTRICAL PRESSURES.

A New California Plant Which Will Employ 60,000 Volts.

From the New York Tribune.

Until very recently it was not deemed safe to transmit power in the form of electricity at a greater pressure than 10,000 or 15,000 volts. Between Niagara and Buffalo a voltage of 11,000 is now employed, but this will be doubled before many weeks. The pressure on the Folsom-Sacramento line in California is 11,000 volts. A line in Colorado which operates machinery in mines near Canyon City transmits its current at 20,000 volts. The two most remarkable transmission plants in this country, and probably in the world, in point of voltages, are those at Telluride, Col., and the line from San Bernardino to Los Angeles, Cal. The former is short, but carries the current at 40,000 volts. This pressure was adopted as a regular thing after a series of tests in which a voltage of 50,000 was successfully sustained for thirty-seven consecutive days. The San Bernardino line though, while worked at only 33,000 volts, is eighty-three miles long and carries no less than 10,000 horse-power. On the whole, electricians regard it the boldest achievement in electrical transmission yet recorded.

Within the next few months an even more notable success will probably be announced from California. A corporation which now controls several power houses and is supplying current to towns and mining districts in Yuba and Nevada counties has nearly completed a line to Oakland and San Francisco that will be 140 miles in length. On some of its existing lines the company is transmitting at 16,000 and 24,000 volts. But the transformers will be capable of giving 40,000, 50,000 or 60,000 on the Oakland route. Operations will begin at 40,000 volts, and the higher pressure will be resorted to as soon as the losses which result from an increasing "load" exceed 10 per cent. The line is being constructed with a view to standing 60,000 volts regularly.

FACTS ABOUT ASPHALT.

Its Origin, Where It Is Obtained and Its Commercial Use.

From the New York Tribune.

The dispute between two rival American corporations over the possession of an asphalt lake in Venezuela has caused especial interest in what an asphalt lake is like and how asphalt is mined and shipped to market. Asphalt, or asphaltum, is the solid form of bitumen. Bitumen is a generic term which is applied to a variety of substances, ranging from natural gas, naptha, petroleum and mineral tar to asphalt. The asphalts of different localities vary greatly in composition, as is shown by their chemical reactions. Nearly all are amorphous and have the general appearance of pitch, melting at about the temperature of boiling water. Asphalt, it is thought by scientists, has resulted from the hardening of the maltha and petroleum elements, through oxygenation and evaporation.

One of the most interesting asphalt beds in the world is the pitch lake in the state of Bermudez, Venezuela. This valuable deposit was unknown to American capitalists until 1888, when an American engineer, Ambrose Howard Carner, received a title to the property from the Venezuelan government. This he sold to the New York and Bermudez company, which is closely allied to the so-called asphalt trust, of which General F. V. Greene is president. The several square miles which are included in the concession obtained have, in the last thirteen years, been steadily improved. The company has cleared the Maturin river to navigation, so that deep sea craft from all quarters of the globe can run in from the Caribbean sea, past the British possession of Trinidad Island, and inland to the docks of the company at Guanoco.

The town of Guanoco is the river terminus of the Bermudez company's railroad. Here are hundreds of native Venezuelans, working under the eye of an American superintendent. The raw asphalt is brought from the lake, five mile distant, on flat cars, and shoveled into the holds of the vessels. At Guanoco this operation is much simpler than at Trinidad, where lighters are necessary because of the long, shelving beach of the harbor. The railroad follows an old Indian trail, which led from the river to the shores of the pitch lake. The surface of the lake is so hard that for some distance from the shore it supports the weight of a loaded train. As one looks over the surface of this great deposit he at first sees nothing of a striking or unusual nature. He views only a black plain, resembling anthracite coal, or flint, upon which are groups of natives working with picks and shovels. Closer examination, however, shows that portions of the surface are soft like tar, where the asphalt is sticky and bubbling. Asphalt is distinguishable from anthracite not only by its form, but because it is soluble in bisulphide of carbon and benzole. These pitch pools resemble somewhat the hot springs of the Yellowstone region. They slowly cool, and become hardened after many years. As at Trinidad, they vary in depth. Some of them have never been fully sounded, and are thought by the natives to extend into the bowels of the earth.

The asphalt which is mined at Bermudez Lake is more or less hardened, and is obtained with some difficulty, as it retains the sun's heat to a trying degree.

The Bermudez company, after years of experiment, has succeeded in putting on the market asphalt which will neither crack from cold nor melt under the burning sun. About a decade ago vehicles were likely to cut into asphalt pavements in the summer months. By chemical treatment this has been obviated in all the newer pavements, even in hot countries, where it fully resists the sun's heat, and at the same time retains its durability and elasticity.

Asphalt is used largely in the manufacture of cements. It is mixed with a petroleum residue to render it plastic, and is then tempered with one-seventh its weight of sand. It also forms one of the most durable waterproof materials known. For roofing purposes it is mixed, while hot, with fine gravel, or is absorbed by thick rolls of felt paper.

Asphalt is found in many countries. In Vera Cruz, Mexico, near the village of Moloasan, is a mountain largely composed of asphalt. The deposits at Seyssel, France and at Val de Travers, Switzerland, consist of limestone impregnated with bituminous matter, which, when heated, crumbles to a powder. After it has been pounded into molds and is cooled it resembles the original rock. Over one thousand miles of the streets of Paris have been supplied from these two localities.

POPULATION, 300,000,000.

The United States Fully Able to Sustain This Number.

O. P. Austin in the Forum.

Belgium had in 1897 a population of 579 per square mile, with 2,867 miles of railway, 5,743 miles of public roads, and 1,370 miles of navigable waters and canals; the area is less than that of Maryland but the population sustained is six times as great. Netherlands in 1898 had a population of 401 per square mile, with about 1,000 miles of railway, 3,000 miles of navigable water, exclusive of canals, and 1,907 miles of canals, in an area about equal to that of Massachusetts and Connecticut combined, but a population 50 per cent. greater than that of those densely populated states. England and Wales had in 1891 a population of 498 per square mile, with 150,000 miles of railway, 2,268 miles of canals, and an admirable highway system, the area being about equal to that of the state of Georgia; and the present population twelve times as great.

Porto Rico, which is looked upon as having an extremely dense population, has only about 225 inhabitants per square mile, with very little development in railways and roads; and General Roy Stone, who has spent much time in that island since American occupation, stated, in a recent address before the American Academy of Political and Social Science, that in his opinion the island, which now sustains less than 1,000,000 inhabitants, can well support fully 5,000,000 people, since not more than one-fourth of the soil is now under cultivation. By properly developing its producing powers, and exchanging these products for foodstuffs from other parts of the world, it would probably be able to sustain more than five times its present population, or more than 1,000 per square mile. Barbadoes, one of the British West Indies, has a population of more than 1,100 per square mile, yet is looked upon as a prosperous community. The two most prosperous countries of the world, aside from the United States, are England and Germany; yet they now sustain, on a combined area less than that of Texas, a population greater than that of the entire United States and twenty-five times as great as that which Texas now supports.

With a great railway system stretching from Patagonia to Alaska, and connecting across Bering Straits with an Asiatic railway system; with wireless telegraphy enabling instantaneous communication from city to city, and telephones so developed that man may speak from continent to continent; with the art of ocean navigation much more highly developed, and perhaps the navigation of the air as completely mastered as that of the ocean is today, the United States, with its power to interchange its products, will be in touch with those of other lands, and its power to sustain a population of 300,000,000—yes, even a billion—will be greater than that by which the prosperous nations of Europe sustain their present population.